

# The Dual Concepts Objection to Content Externalism

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## Abstract:

Many philosophers have used premises about concepts and rationality to argue that the protagonists in the various Twin-Earth thought experiments do not have the concepts that content externalists say they have. This essay argues that this popular internalist argument is flawed in many different ways, and more importantly it cannot be repaired in order to cast doubt on externalism.

Some philosophers have noticed that content externalism, the rough thesis that one could have lived the same internal physical life one actually has lived and yet have different belief contents, seems to be inconsistent with intuitive principles regarding concepts and rationality. Here is a case that motivates their criticism.

Alf is an ordinary teenager who is aware of the term 'arthritis' and who in the normal way comes to sincerely and rationally assent to 'Uncle Bob had arthritis'. He has no opinion regarding the relationship between arthritis and inflammation of the joints; he has never even considered it. Keep in mind, however, that someone in our story has stipulated that 'arthritis' picks out inflammation of the joints. Later he goes to medical school and learns about arthritis. However, during this time period he mistakenly thinks 'arthritis' is ambiguous just like 'bank' is ambiguous; he even says exactly that. He thinks 'arthritis' stands for two different medical conditions (and not merely a generic medical condition inflammation of the joints, as Alf uses just those words when talking about Uncle Bob. In his confusion in medical school Alf utters with all sincerity 'Uncle Bob had arthritis' (thinking that he is talking about the medical condition he learned about as a child) and 'Uncle Bob didn't have arthritis' (thinking that he is talking about the medical condition he learned about in medical school). This (unrealistic) story is in the spirit of Tyler Burge's (1979) argument for externalism.

Now we have all the materials we need to generate an intriguing objection, what I will call *the Dual Concepts Objection*, to externalism.<sup>1</sup> The argument is its simplest and most intuitive with just four premises.

- A. When Alf is in medical school and he says ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ and ‘Uncle Bob didn’t have arthritis’ he has two different concepts associated with his uses of ‘arthritis’.

Premise (A) is intuitive: if Alf expressed the very same concept with those two sentences, then he would be irrational in assenting to those two sentences; but he isn’t irrational, just confused. So (A) seems pretty plausible.

- B. The concept Alf associates with ‘arthritis’ in the sentence he utters when he is reflecting on what he is learning in medical school, ‘Uncle Bob *didn’t* have arthritis’ (as well as ‘Arthritis is inflammation of the joints’) is the concept of arthritis.

He gets *this* use of ‘arthritis’ right because he is fully aware of the connection between this use of ‘arthritis’ and ‘inflammation of the joints’, and he uses ‘arthritis’ to express all sorts of expert truths about arthritis (its symptoms, treatments, causes, etc.). So (B) seems right.

An apparent logical consequence of these first two premises: the concept Alf associates with ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ in medical school, when he is reflecting on what his mother told him many years ago about Uncle Bob, isn’t the concept of arthritis; it’s some other concept. Next premise:

- C. The concept Alf associated with ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ *in* medical school is the same as the concept he associated with ‘arthritis’ in his assents to that very same sentence *before* medical school.

That is, his education and confusion don’t change the concept he associates with ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’, which you’ll recall he assents to *only* when remembering episodes from his childhood. It stands to reason that in *these* assents he is employing the concept he acquired as a boy, as he is reflecting on what he said and thought and learned back then. Thus, (C) looks awfully good too.

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<sup>1</sup> Variants of the Dual Concepts Objection appear and are usually endorsed in each of the following: Kent Bach 1987; Akeel Bilgrami 1992; John Biro 1992; Reinaldo Elugardo 1993; Frank Jackson & Phillip Pettit 1993; Brian Loar 1987a, 1987b, 1988; Kirk Ludwig 1999; Sarah Patterson 1990; Derk Pereboom 1995; Gabriel Segal 2000; William Taschek 1995; and Ken Taylor 1995. Not all of these authors use the argument to argue against externalism; some use it to argue for the existence of a kind of content other than truth-conditional content. I will not be addressing those arguments in this essay.

A logical consequence of these three reasonable premises: Alf doesn't associate the arthritis concept with his uses of 'Uncle Bob had arthritis' *even before* medical school. This amounts to the antecedent of the final premise:

- D. If he didn't associate the arthritis concept at that time, as a teenager, with his uses of 'arthritis', then since he didn't zero in on that concept in any other way (e.g., via 'inflammation of the joints' or some synonym for 'arthritis' from another language) he didn't have any (*de dicto*) arthritis beliefs back then.

This premise seems reasonable as well. If he doesn't use 'arthritis' to express the concept of arthritis, and he hasn't zeroed on it in any other way, then naturally he doesn't have any *de dicto* ascribed arthritis beliefs (although of course he can have *de re* arthritis beliefs). It's also reasonable to suppose that he need not have zeroed in on the concept of arthritis as a child in any way other than through 'arthritis' (via 'inflammation of the joints' for instance).

The plausible (A)-(D) logically entail that as a teenager Alf didn't believe that arthritis is painful. However, this contradicts an essential premise in the defense of externalism. The externalist imagines someone, Bert, in two possible worlds, one in which 'arthritis' is stipulatively tied to 'inflammation of the joints' and another in which it is stipulatively tied to, for instance, 'inflammation of the joints caused by calcium deposits'. The externalist argues that in the first world Bert believes that arthritis is painful; in the second world he doesn't have that belief content; yet he is physically identical in the two worlds; hence, externalism is true. But as we just saw, the logical consequence of (A)-(D) says the first premise of the externalist's argument is false, the premise that in the first world teenage Bert had any arthritis beliefs. The reason is simple: teenage Alf in the thought experiment above is in *the very same* situation Bert is in (acquiring the use of 'arthritis' without knowing of the definition or being disposed to accept it). Hence, if Alf doesn't have arthritis beliefs, then Bert doesn't either. So, the argument for externalism fails. Note that the objection does not attempt to refute externalism; it attempts to refute one of the main premises in the most popular argument for externalism.

On the face of it, this is a serious difficulty for externalists, and one that has not been adequately dealt with in the enormous literature on externalism. Many authors have advocated arguments in the vicinity of the one above, so the Dual Concepts Objection has a decent pedigree. In my judgment, the main premises of the argument receive their best representations in the book by Gabriel Segal and paper by Kirk Ludwig; the intuitive considerations behind the argument are best presented in the series of papers by Brian Loar. In formulating the Dual Concepts Objection as above (and more rigorously below), I have opted to concentrate on what I believe to be the best version of the arguments considered by these philosophers. My purpose in this essay is to thoroughly examine the Dual Concepts Objection. I will argue that this popular internalist argument is flawed in many different ways, and more importantly it cannot be repaired in order to cast doubt on externalism.

### 1. Clarifications

In order to determine how bad the situation is for externalism we need to be clear on the nature of the Dual Concepts Objection, for there are side issues that threaten to divert us from the main ones.

First, it should be noticed that the challenge can be generated with words that don't have stipulative, descriptive meanings, as 'arthritis' does in the fiction in which Alf exists. The story described in the Dual Concepts Objection is just a variant of Saul Kripke's (1979) puzzle about belief. In the latter story, Peter rationally comes to (mistakenly) think that his uses of 'Paderewski' stand for two people, just as his uses of 'Aristotle' do. He thinks that there is a politician and a distinct pianist with that name. He says, in all sincerity and after expert logical reflection, 'Paderewski has musical talent [thinking of him as a pianist] and Paderewski doesn't have musical talent [thinking of him as a politician]', thereby apparently expressing different concepts or perhaps other notions or "ways of conceiving" with each use of 'Paderewski'. Peter presents the same problem that Alf does (although the notion of concepts corresponding to proper names brings up additional issues, ones we can ignore here). The same challenge comes with natural kinds as well: Greg might say that 'gold' is ambiguous (he says it's just like 'bank') and end up sincerely uttering 'Gold is F and gold isn't F' (I'll have more to say about Greg's situation below). What unites Kripke's Peter and the externalist's Alf or Greg is the question whether we can take the protagonists at their word, applying Disquotational principles as usual so that their utterances of 'Arthritis is F', 'Paderewski is F', or 'Gold is F' are sufficient for holding that they believe that arthritis or Paderewski or gold is such-and-such. The internalist objection given above concludes that before medical school when Alf said 'Arthritis is F' he didn't believe that arthritis is F. Thus, the argument is an attempted refutation of Disquotation, viz. the rough thesis that if you sincerely and competently say 'P' then you believe that P.

I've overstated the case a bit, but not much. One might argue that the 'arthritis' case is crucially different from the 'Paderewski' and 'gold' cases, perhaps because only 'arthritis' has (in our fiction) a stipulative definition. That difference will be addressed below.

Second, the Dual Concepts Objection affects every theory of concepts, rationality, and belief. The internalist argument concludes that people who don't know the definition of 'arthritis' (and haven't zeroed in on the concept in some other way, through their own stipulation perhaps) don't have any *de dicto* arthritis beliefs, which is fairly counterintuitive since, I would guess, there are hundreds of millions of English speakers who satisfy those conditions and yet seem to use 'arthritis' appropriately.<sup>2</sup> Yet the four premises of the apparently valid argument given above are plausible; so perhaps we should just swallow the counterintuitive result. Thus, the Dual Concepts Objection presents us with a philosophical puzzle, a hard case for just about *any* theory, and not just the externalist ones (below I show how it leads to problems with internalism). (Indeed, that was the crux of Kripke's point in presenting the Paderewski puzzle, although his target was different.) So if some externalist theory has troubles dealing with it, this fact does not automatically generate a decent argument for any rival view, as any rival view might do no better in treating the puzzle.

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<sup>2</sup> Here I'm assuming that for most any person who doesn't know the definition, she could have ended up in Alf's situation.

Third, it is relatively clear what the primary source of the puzzle is: our multifaceted use of ‘concept’. Recall the first premise of the Dual Concepts Objection: when after graduating from medical school Alf says ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ and ‘Uncle Bob didn’t have arthritis’ he has two different concepts associated with his uses of ‘arthritis’. Whether this premise is plausible is going to depend in large part on how we construe its use of ‘concept’. And whether or not the remaining premises of the Dual Concepts Objection are plausible will depend largely on how ‘concept’ is interpreted in them. I will return to this disambiguation issue below.

## 2. *Why the Dual Concepts Objection Is Flawed*

There is a virtually conclusive reason for thinking that the Dual Concepts Objection is flawed in at least one crucial respect—a flaw that makes the objection powerless to reveal a problem in the argument for externalism. That’s the conclusion of this, the most important, section of the essay. Here is the Dual Concepts Objection again, presented with some rigor:

1. **Concept Possession:** As a child and teenager Alf assertively used many ordinary sentences containing ‘arthritis’, and he did so in many ordinary and fully appropriate circumstances. In particular, he assertively used ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ in several fully appropriate circumstances. Let ‘C<sub>1</sub>’ refer to the concept he associates as a teenager with ‘arthritis’ in that particular sentence. We’re not saying that C<sub>1</sub> is the concept of arthritis (however one understands ‘the concept of arthritis’). Instead, we are saying that his competence as a teenager with ‘arthritis’ is high enough that he consistently associates *some* concept with it; we’re also saying that he associates just *one* concept with it. As we will understand ‘associate’, the concept “associated” with certain uses of a term is the concept that “one has in one’s mind” in those uses of the term, the concept that “goes with” one’s use of that term.<sup>3</sup>
2. There is a *non-actual* possibility as described earlier in which Alf then goes to medical school, comes to think ‘arthritis’ is ambiguous, and sincerely and rationally says ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ and ‘Uncle Bob didn’t have arthritis’. He says the latter when thinking about the medical condition he has learned about in medical school. Analogous to premise (1), we are assuming that his competence as medical student with ‘arthritis’ in his assertive uses of ‘Uncle Bob didn’t have arthritis’ is high enough that he consistently associates *some* concept with it; we’re also saying that he associates just *one* concept with it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, one might be wary of the slippery notion of “having a concept associated with a term”. But this is the problem for the many advocates of the Dual Concepts Objection, not its critics, so don’t blame me!

<sup>4</sup> One might well object that this scenario is unlikely, and thus the Dual Concepts Objection fails. But recall that the scenario doesn’t have to be actual; the mere possibility of the (unlikely) scenario is what the objector needs.

3. **Concept Stability:** Even if that happened, as a medical school student when he assertively used ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ (upon simply calling up the belief from his childhood) Alf would still associate with *that* use of ‘arthritis’ the very same single concept that he as a teenager associated with ‘arthritis’ in his assertive uses of that very same sentence. This is akin to premise (C) from the Introduction.
4. Premises (2) and (3) entail that there’s a possible world W in which he gets confused as described in (2) and in which his uses of ‘arthritis’ in his post-medical school and pre-medical school assents to the single sentence ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ are associated with the same single concept. By (1), in W the pre-medical school use of ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ is associated with just C<sub>1</sub>; thus, the medical school use of ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ is associated with just C<sub>1</sub>.
5. **Distinct Concepts:** When due to a mistaken belief that  $\lceil F \rceil$  is ambiguous someone sincerely and rationally assertively uses  $\lceil a \text{ has } F \rceil$  and  $\lceil a \text{ doesn't have } F \rceil$ , where each use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  is associated with just one concept, the concept she associates with the first use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  isn’t identical to the concept she associates with the second use of  $\lceil F \rceil$ . This holds in the actual world as well as perfectly realistic worlds like W. This is akin to premise (A) from the Introduction.
6. Since by (2) in W during medical school Alf satisfies the antecedent of (5) applied to ‘arthritis’, he also satisfies, in W during medical school, the consequent of (5) applied to ‘arthritis’. Hence, the single concept C<sub>2</sub> Alf associates with ‘arthritis’ in ‘Uncle Bob *didn't* have arthritis’ isn’t the single concept he associates with ‘arthritis’ in ‘Uncle Bob *did* have arthritis’ (both utterances occurring during medical school). The latter concept is C<sub>1</sub>, by (4). So C<sub>2</sub> ≠ C<sub>1</sub>.
7. **Expertise:** In W the single concept medical-school Alf associates with ‘arthritis’ in his assents to ‘Uncle Bob *didn't* have arthritis’, i.e., C<sub>2</sub>, is the concept of arthritis, C<sub>A</sub>. Here we stipulate that “the concept of arthritis” is the concept or “conceptual content” that one needs to associate with ‘arthritis’ in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of  $\lceil \text{believes that arthritis is } X \rceil$ .<sup>5</sup> By ‘*de dicto* uses of  $\lceil \text{believes that arthritis is } X \rceil$ ’ I mean uses for which ‘arthritis’ is used in an oblique manner. A term is used obliquely in a belief ascription when it doesn’t appear to be truth preservingly interchangeable with coextensional terms, as in ‘Lois Lane believes Superman flies’ (even if ultimately speaking Millians are right about such sentences).<sup>6</sup> So, Expertise amounts to the claim that C<sub>2</sub> = C<sub>A</sub>. One reason for endorsing Expertise is that Alf says, upon being competently reintroduced to ‘arthritis’ in medical school, all sorts of expert and true things about arthritis using ‘arthritis’—including the highly relevant fact (in our story) that it’s in virtue of a stipulative definition that ‘arthritis’ and ‘inflammation of the

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<sup>5</sup> This conceptual content is not a proposition but a component of a proposition.

<sup>6</sup> A Millian holds that ‘Lois believes that Kent flies’ and ‘Lois believes that Superman flies’ have the same truth-value, but that doesn’t mean he fails to recognize obliqueness in the sense characterized above. It just means he will have to spell it out differently from how the Fregean does it.

- joints' are coextensional—and then concludes partly on their basis with 'Uncle Bob didn't have arthritis'. This is akin to premise (B) from the Introduction.
8. It follows from (6) and (7) (i.e.,  $C_2 \neq C_1$  and  $C_2 = C_A$ ) that  $C_1 \neq C_A$ . Let me clarify what ' $C_1 \neq C_A$ ' amounts to. Recall that  $C_1$  is the single concept he *actually* associates as a teenager with 'arthritis'. From (6) and (7) we know that  $C_1$  isn't  $C_A$ . It follows that he doesn't associate  $C_A$  with 'arthritis' as a teen. Thus, *in the actual world and without any relevant linguistic confusion at all at any time, past, present, or future*, teenage Alf doesn't associate the concept of arthritis with his uses of 'arthritis'. And recall that "the concept of arthritis" is, in our terminology, the concept that one needs to associate with 'arthritis' in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X'. Thus, ' $C_1 \neq C_A$ ' says that teenage Alf doesn't associate with his uses of 'arthritis' the concept that one needs to associate with 'arthritis' in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X'.
  9. Ordinarily, if someone satisfies *de dicto* uses of 'believes that F is X' and repeatedly assents to 'F is X' under fully appropriate circumstances, then they satisfy that belief ascription in part by means of associating with their uses of 'F' the concept of F. From (8) we know that Alf doesn't associate with his uses of 'arthritis' the concept of arthritis. Even so, he could satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X' if he zeroed in on the concept of arthritis in some other way. We definitely know this, which is claim (9): *if you don't associate concept C with your uses of 'F' and C is the concept that one needs to associate with 'F' in order to satisfy de dicto uses of 'believes that F is X', then you don't satisfy de dicto uses of 'believes that F is X' unless you zeroed in on C in some other way.*
  10. Notice that the antecedent of (9) is true when applied to Alf,  $C_A$ , 'arthritis', and 'believes that arthritis is X'. This comes from claim (8) and a stipulation in (7) (more specifically: the first conjunct of the antecedent of (9) comes from (8); the second conjunct comes from (7)). So we can conclude (from (7), (8), and (9)) the consequent of (9) applied to the case at hand: Alf doesn't satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X' unless he zeroed in on  $C_A$  in some other way. Let (10) be that instance of the consequent of (9).
  11. But although teenage Alf has heard 'inflammation' and 'joints' (and uses them with the usual low degree of competency found in teenagers kept relatively clear of medical discussions), he has not put them together in any relevant fashion so as to zero in on  $C_A$ . We are free to make this stipulation since it doesn't conflict with previous parts of the story. So, the 'unless' clause in (10) is not satisfied. Claims (9)-(11) amount to a precisification of Premise (D) from the Introduction.
  12. Thus, by (10) and (11) we have the twin results that as a teenager Alf (a) didn't associate with 'arthritis' the concept of arthritis and (b) didn't satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X' (even though he repeatedly said in perfectly appropriate circumstances things like 'Arthritis is painful', 'Arthritis is bad when it's humid', 'When someone has arthritis in their hands they find it hard to tie their shoes', 'Whereas Uncle Bob has arthritis in his hands, Rover the dog has it in his back legs', etc).

From (12) it follows that Burge and the other externalists are wrong in thinking that as a teenager Alf satisfied *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X'. And this holds even though Alf will never actually get confused about 'arthritis' as in world W or as in Burge's original thought experiment. Thus, the argument attempts to show that before you found out that arthritis is inflammation of the joints (which may have happened when you read Burge 1979!) you didn't believe that arthritis occurs in hands—even though you confidently said 'Arthritis occurs in hands'.

I assume that there is a perspective from which the conclusion (12) is at least a little intuitive. After all, even though in the actual world Alf never goes to medical school and ends up linguistically confused, the mere fact that in the actual world we can point to him and truly say that his understanding of 'arthritis' is so dim that we could easily get him to assent to a linguistic contradiction, 'Uncle Bob had arthritis, but he didn't have arthritis', shows that his grasp of the concept is so tenuous that he doesn't really have the concept well enough to have arthritis beliefs. I'm *not* saying this; this is what the internalist (who accepts the objection) is saying.

However, to see that there is a serious problem with the Dual Concepts Objection, pretend that you don't know that gold is the element with atomic number 79; in fact, you don't know much chemistry. It would be easy for me to make you think 'gold' is ambiguous. First, I inform you of some chemistry and the fact that the element with atomic number 79 is called 'gold'. I then get you to accept the truth (let's pretend, for the sake of a simple example sentence) 'Pure gold, the element with atomic number 79, is almost pure white'; I can just flash my physics degrees at you and you'll be at my mercy! You may already assent to the utterly reasonable but false 'Pure gold is yellow'. So you could end up endorsing with all reasonableness 'Gold is yellow' and 'Gold isn't yellow', believing that there are two substances called 'gold'. With the Dual Concepts Objection (1)-(12) applied to 'gold' instead of 'arthritis', the mere *possibility* of such a future episode—it doesn't have to actually ever happen!—means that *you never associated the concept of gold with your uses of 'gold'*, even in the actual world in which you never get confused. Neither do you satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believe that gold is valuable and used in wedding rings'. That's the conclusion analogous to (12). If it were right, then up until quite recently virtually *no one* had the concept of gold or had *de dicto* ascribed gold beliefs, as for almost any given person from long ago, we could have pulled a 'gold'-is-ambiguous trick on them upon introducing them to a bit of chemistry.

The implication is clear: the 'gold' case shows that the premises in the internalist's Dual Concepts objection lead to a falsehood (the falsehood being (12) applied to 'gold'); thus, those premises aren't all true; thus, the objection applied to 'arthritis' has a false premise—*unless* there is some crucial difference in the premises applied to 'gold' and 'arthritis' that makes the premises true for 'arthritis' but false for 'gold'.

One might think we can soften the blow of the conclusion that you don't have any *de dicto* ascribed gold beliefs (thereby attempting to cut off the implication that (12) is false for 'gold') by distinguishing the concept one associates with one's use of the word from the concept conventionally corresponding to



the word: although you don't associate with 'gold' the concept of gold, the truth-conditional value of your uses of 'gold' is the concept of gold. Thus, when as a child you said 'Mommy's ring is made of gold', your use of 'gold' expressed the concept of gold and referred to gold, even though strictly speaking you didn't associate with 'gold' the concept of gold.

However, I don't think this move is plausible. For instance, if the solution were right, no one associated with 'gold' the concept of gold until some scientists did so pretty recently, and yet we *expressing* it for centuries. How did that happen? Furthermore, surely we were *saying* that gold is yellow for centuries; but if we can say P, why couldn't we believe P? Finally, I don't see any positive reason to accept the proposal. As we will see below, the proposal may have some merit applied to a stipulative term like 'arthritis', but it is implausible and unmotivated for 'gold'. Of course, some philosophers of mind and language might be willing to swallow these counterintuitive consequences of accepting the Dual Concepts Objection applied to 'gold', but I don't see much reason to bite those bullets.

Another attempt to soften the blow (by showing that (12) is true for 'gold', so it might be true for 'arthritis' as well) suggests that my objection implicitly relies on construing the internalist as a descriptivist, and then notes that some forms of internalism are not descriptivist. Upon hearing my assertion 'Pure gold, the element with atomic number 79, is almost pure white' the subject concluded that this assertion concerns some substance other than the one she was already familiar with, since the latter is definitely yellow. But why does she do this? Answer: because she must be taking her 'gold' to be short for something like 'The yellow metallic substance that was used as the basis for some economies, is used in wedding rings, etc.' And if she has that conception of her concept, well then she really doesn't have the concept of gold, since that is not a descriptive concept. So the conclusion in the 'gold' reading of (12)—she didn't have the concept of gold and didn't have any *de dicto* ascribed gold beliefs—is not implausible. Thus, my objection to the (1)-(12) argument applied to 'gold' instead of 'arthritis' is faulty, as I have revealed no problem with the argument applied to 'gold'.

However, I see no reason to accept the premise that the protagonist must be taking her 'gold' to be descriptive. Indeed, the premise is highly implausible. She has seen lots of gold and all of it has been yellow. She has never even heard of any gold being anything other than pure yellow. When she hears me talking some chemistry with some other scientifically informed people and talking about how "pure gold" is an element that is white (and my co-conversationalists wholeheartedly agree with me), she doesn't need any view on concepts to conclude that I must be talking about something other than the substance she is already familiar with. All she needs to think is this: all the gold I've heard about is clearly yellow; this guy seems to know what he's talking about and he is saying that "gold" isn't yellow; I guess he's talking about something else called 'gold'.

Think of analogous cases, even real-life ones. You have heard about Ernie Sosa for years. Then you hear me using 'Sosa' to talk about some philosopher. I'm attributing all sorts of philosophy of language views to him that Ernie Sosa has never had or even discussed. Other people in the conversation confirm that I've got the views of "Sosa" right and we proceed to discuss how he conceives of Kripke's puzzle about belief. At this point you might well conclude that I'm using 'Sosa' to talk about some other philosopher

(it turns out to be David Sosa, his son; or I was in fact talking about Ernie and just got his views all wrong). Your reasoning certainly doesn't suggest that you take your uses of 'Sosa' to be descriptive in any sense. Going back to the gold case, the protagonist might even be a philosopher who thinks that all forms of descriptivism are false. My objection to the conclusion of the 'gold' version of (1)-(12) doesn't rely on the assumption that internalism is descriptive.<sup>7</sup>

I take this to be a *reductio* of the Dual Concepts Objection schema (1)-(12) *when it is applied to natural kind terms* such as 'gold'. This shows that the argument cannot be used to criticize natural kinds externalism—externalism applied to natural kind terms such as 'gold'. Thus, the argument captured by (1)-(12) can mount a serious challenge only to what I will call *non-natural kinds* externalism—externalism applied to terms that aren't natural kind terms. Henceforth I will assume that the internalist holds that although (1)-(12) are true for 'arthritis', she concedes that they are not all true for 'gold'.

However, this is no small concession I have forced on the internalist! If we are externalists about beliefs expressed with 'gold' (and 'Paderewski'<sup>8</sup>), then central externalist issues—the failure of local supervenience (Burge 1982), the self-knowledge issues (Burge 1988), the externalist arguments against skepticism (McKinsey 1990), and the externalist argument against token physicalism (Burge 1993, Frances 2007), none of which I will discuss in this essay—are all engaged. Does it really *matter* whether externalism is also true for terms other than names and natural kind terms? I don't see any big issue hanging on whether externalism holds for general terms other than natural kind ones.

Hence, we have my central thesis of this essay: the Dual Concepts Objection does not defeat externalism or any premise in the argument for externalism; *at best* it can refute only the *extension* of externalist arguments to general terms, such as stipulative ones, that aren't natural kind terms. Thus, we have already seen that if the internalist wishes to set sail in the Dual Concepts Objection, then the wind is taken out of the sails of the internalist's ship. The objection simply can't be a serious threat to externalism, contrary to the many philosophers listed in note 1. Of course, we should not be satisfied with the refutation of the objection until we know precisely *where* it goes wrong. Thus, in the remainder of this essay I attempt to sink the internalist's ship by revealing where the Dual Concepts Objection fails for 'gold' and 'arthritis'.

### 3. The Choices Available to the Internalist

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<sup>7</sup> One might think that I have misrepresented the internalist by assuming that there is such a thing as "the" concept of arthritis, and she need not hold that view. In Expertise above I stipulated that "the concept of arthritis" is the concept or, if you prefer, conceptual content, that one needs to associate with 'arthritis' in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X'. One might think to the contrary that there is a range of conceptual contents that are sufficient for satisfying *de dicto* uses of 'believes that arthritis is X'. So Expertise is false. I don't know how to repair the internalist's objection to accommodate this alternative strategy.

<sup>8</sup> We can apply (1)-(12) to 'Paderewski' just like we did for 'gold' and get a false result.

We have seen that the internalist must hold that at least some of the premises in (1)-(12) are false when applied to 'gold' even though they are true when applied to 'arthritis'. She needs to do two things: show us which of the 'gold' premises are false while convincing us that the corresponding 'arthritis' premises are true (and the latter is interesting if we are worried that the Dual Concepts Objection shows that the externalist argument fails for general terms that aren't natural kind terms).

Accordingly, in the remainder of this essay I have two main tasks. One, I need to find out what is wrong with the Dual Concepts Objection applied to 'gold'. After all, the objection (1)-(12) is valid and has plausible premises; if we know the conclusion is false then we have a puzzle on our hands even if we are diehard externalists. Two, I need to determine whether those problems infect the Dual Concepts Objection applied to 'arthritis' and other general yet non-natural kind terms.

There are seven premises: (1), (2), (3), (5), (7), (9), and (11). In order to complete the two main tasks I will examine just (3), (5), and (7). Premises (1) and (2) are obviously true for both 'arthritis' and 'gold', so we can ignore them. One might protest that teenage Alf is not competent in the use of 'arthritis' and so associates *no* concept at all with his use of that term. If so, then Concept Possession, (1), is false for 'arthritis' but not for 'gold'. But I for one can't think of any merit this move might have. We will find enough problems with (3), (5), and (7) that it will be unnecessary to examine (9) or (11). The internalist we're considering wants to argue that these three premises (viz. (3), (5), and (7)) are true for 'arthritis' but at least one of them is false for 'gold'; one of our tasks is to see if she's right about that.

To anticipate: I will argue that the key premises are multiply ambiguous, and different readings have different truth-values. So we can't just say something like 'Premise X is false, which is why the Dual Concepts Objection fails for 'gold''. This complicates the discussion somewhat, but that's philosophy for you. I'll argue first in the next section that although (5), Distinct Concepts, is quite plausible under some disambiguations of 'concept', under those interpretations (3) and (7) are either false or dubious for both 'gold' and 'arthritis'. So those disambiguations don't reveal any problem with non-natural kinds externalism, and they show where the internalist 'gold' objection goes wrong under some disambiguations of 'concept'. In Section 5 I'll argue that for truth-conditional content in particular (a notion I'll try to explain), Distinct Concepts is equally plausible for 'gold' and 'arthritis' but that under that interpretation Distinct Concepts is probably false. So, non-natural kinds externalism is still untouched and we see once again how the Dual Concepts Objection is flawed for 'gold' and 'arthritis'.

#### *4. Total Conceptions*

For centuries philosophers got tied up in knots using the term 'idea' to cover all sorts of mental entities and non-mental abstract objects (and things wouldn't have been much improved if they set aside the non-mental abstract objects). Today we have 'concept', 'conception', 'content', and 'conceptual component'. Under some interpretations of 'concept', Distinct Concepts looks right to me. For instance, if by 'the concept one associates with 'gold'' we mean to indicate some mental particular, some organic thing literally inside my head and no one else's head, then the principle is plausible (assuming there are

such mental particulars, which of course is controversial even with realism about other mental entities). But under that interpretation the Dual Concepts Objection is silly, as the debate is about *sharable* concepts and beliefs, not particulars had by exactly one person.

If by ‘the concept one associates with ‘gold’’ we mean something like one’s *total conception* of gold or *personal theory* of gold or *set of descriptions* personally associated with ‘gold’, then Distinct Concepts is reasonable, if not true. Presumably, in the non-actual world in which Alf goes to medical school and becomes linguistically confused, he associates two different conceptions or theories with ‘arthritis’; the looseness of ‘conception’ simply guarantees it. One conception is a “folk” one, incorporating descriptions and thoughts from Alf’s childhood; the other is “professional” and includes cognitive bits obtained while in medical school. I want to remain as neutral as possible as to what these “total conceptions” are while granting that they are distinct and sharable; we want to give the internalist every opportunity at success! However, under this interpretation of ‘concept’ premise (3), Concept Stability, is the following.

When as a medical school graduate Alf assertively used ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ (upon simply calling up the belief from his childhood) Alf would still associate with *that* use of ‘arthritis’ the very same single total conception concept that he as a teenager associated with ‘arthritis’ in his assertive uses of that very same sentence.

This claim is dubious, as it is likely he has altered or added to his total folk conception he associates with ‘arthritis’ as a result of attending medical school. Furthermore, premise (7), Expertise, becomes the following:

In W the single total conception concept post-medical-school Alf associates with ‘arthritis’ in ‘Uncle Bob *didn’t* have arthritis’, i.e.,  $C_2$ , is *the* total conception concept of arthritis,  $C_A$ —where we stipulate that “the total conception concept of arthritis” is the total conception concept that one needs to associate with ‘arthritis’ in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of ‘believes that arthritis is X’.

This is confusing, as it isn’t at all obvious what to make of the presumption that there even is such a thing as the total conception concept that one needs to have in one’s mind in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of ‘believes that arthritis is X’. I would have thought that virtually everyone’s *total* conception of arthritis is unique; so what room is left for singling one out as “the” one? Perhaps the internalist’s argument will work for some other notion of ‘concept’ or ‘conception’ (perhaps one quite distant from descriptivist notions); that possibility will be explored below. But for the total-conception conception of ‘concept’, the internalist has made an assumption that she has no business making. So, this is no way for the internalist to mount a decent criticism.

In addition, and crucially, although when construed to target total conceptions premise (5), Distinct Concepts,

When due to a mistaken belief that  $\lceil F \rceil$  is ambiguous someone sincerely and rationally says  $\lceil a \text{ has } F \rceil$  and  $\lceil a \text{ doesn't have } F \rceil$ , where each use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  is associated with just one total conception concept, the total conception concept she associates with the first use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  isn't identical to the total conception concept she associates with the second use of  $\lceil F \rceil$ ,

seems reasonable for 'arthritis', there is every reason to think that it will be exactly as reasonable for 'gold'. That means that we have not located the crucial difference between the 'gold' and 'arthritis' objections, which you'll recall the internalist needs in order to plausibly claim that her objection causes trouble for externalist for non-natural kinds. Thus, for many reasons this construal of 'concept' is of no help to the internalist.

Here is the score thus far. Our internalist claims that (1)-(12) is flawed for 'gold' but not for 'arthritis'. When it comes to total conceptions we have learned four lessons. First, both (5) and (6) are plausible for total conceptions. This is important, I think, because any externalist has to admit that (5) and (6) are simply true for *some* notion of 'concept'; otherwise she can't account for the attraction of so many philosophers to the Dual Concepts Objection. The first lesson vindicates this idea. Second, (5) is just as plausible for 'arthritis' as it is for 'gold', when applied to total conceptions. This shows that the internalist can't locate the 'gold'/'arthritis' difference for total conceptions at premise (5). Third, (3) is implausible for total conceptions. This shows that the internalist's Dual Concept Objection will probably not be successful when applied to total conceptions. Fourth, (7) is implausible for total conceptions (for either 'gold' or 'arthritis'), also suggesting that the Dual Concepts Objection fails when applied to total conceptions.

### 5. Truth-Conditional Contents

In this section I'll argue that under a particularly important construal of 'concept', premise (5), Distinct Concepts, is equally plausible for 'gold' and 'arthritis'. Hence, the internalist won't be able to locate a 'gold'/'arthritis' difference there. I will also argue that Distinct Concepts is probably false under this disambiguation of 'concept' (for 'gold' and 'arthritis'), so we can see *why* the Dual Concepts Objection fails for 'gold' (and 'arthritis') under this disambiguation.

For various reasons philosophers have been primarily (but of course not exclusively; see previous section) interested in *truth-conditional* content. Externalists certainly have been so interested. By the description 'the concept Alf attaches to such and such a use of his of 'arthritis'' philosophers often mean the truth-conditionally relevant conceptual content expressed by a particular use of 'arthritis' by Alf. The truth-conditional content of Alf's use of 'arthritis' includes all *and only* the aspects of his use of 'arthritis' that help determine the truth-value of his belief expressed with simple sentences such as 'Arthritis is worse in humidity'. In order to get a handle on what this means recall Frege's example of 'horse' and 'steed': the terms differ in their psychological *impact*, as we might put it, but are identical in their contribution to the truth conditions of simple sentences of which they are parts (Frege's "Thought" in

his 1997). That is, given an utterance of a simple sentence of the form ‘X is a horse’, for instance, substituting ‘steed’ for ‘horse’ will not change the truth conditions of the utterance, even if it changes other kinds of content or at least psychological properties associated with that sentence. So although the contents of ‘horse’ and ‘steed’ might be different, at least under a broad construal of content, the aspects of their contents that make a difference to truth conditions—the “truth-conditional contents” expressed by those words—are identical. In some sense I “have” two concepts associated with ‘horse’ and ‘steed’, but they have the same truth-conditionally relevant properties—and I consciously know they do (although someone else may not; more on that matter in a moment). They have the same “truth-conditional content” or contribution to truth conditions.

Construed to target truth-conditional content, (5), Distinct Concepts, comes to this.

When due to a mistaken belief that  $\lceil F \rceil$  is ambiguous someone sincerely and rationally says  $\lceil a \text{ has } F \rceil$  and  $\lceil a \text{ doesn't have } F \rceil$ , where each use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  is associated with just one concept, the truth-conditional content of the concept she associates with the first use of  $\lceil F \rceil$  isn't identical to the truth-conditional content of the concept she associates with the second use of  $\lceil F \rceil$ .

I take it that one would endorse this principle only on the basis of some judgment regarding the power of privileged access to one's thoughts. The reason one would think that Alf did not express the same truth-conditional content with his two uses of ‘arthritis’ in ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ and ‘Uncle Bob didn't have arthritis’ is this: if he had expressed the same truth-conditional content with both uses of ‘arthritis’, *then he would immediately know it*, and upon realizing the sameness of content, he would retract at least one of the assertions. Since he didn't retract anything, he must not have expressed the same truth-conditional content with his two uses of ‘arthritis’. Now if he had had a sufficiently deviant view of logic, then he might not be bothered. But Alf is a normal, rational person who doesn't endorse or even know about any deviant logics, so he would not endorse  $\lceil a \text{ has } F \text{ and } a \text{ doesn't have } F \rceil$  if he knew (or even believed) that he was attaching the same truth-condition content to each occurrence of  $\lceil F \rceil$  (or  $\lceil a \rceil$  for that matter).

Assume for the time being that the internalist wants her argument to apply to truth-conditional content. If I'm right in the previous paragraph about what motivates one to accept Distinct Concepts applied to truth-conditional contents (viz., commitment to some privileged access principle), then the internalist won't be able to use that premise to find the key disanalogy between the Dual Concepts Objection applied to ‘arthritis’ and applied to ‘gold’. That is, there is no “privileged access” reason to think that (5) is true for ‘arthritis’ but false for ‘gold,’ when we construe ‘concept’ as ‘truth-conditional content’. After all, if Alf can know immediately that he isn't expressing the same truth-conditional content with his two uses of ‘arthritis’ in ‘Uncle Bob had arthritis’ and ‘Uncle Bob didn't have arthritis’, then he can know the analogous truth about his two uses of ‘gold’ in ‘Gold is yellow’ and ‘Gold isn't yellow’. If we have such a privileged access to arthritis thoughts, then surely we have the same access to gold thoughts. If that's right, then the internalist is out of luck.

Even so, is Distinct Concepts true for truth-conditional contents? I want to question the privileged access claim that Alf would immediately be able to tell if he had expressed the same truth-conditional content with his two uses of 'arthritis'. The internalist we are interested in (i.e., the one who advocates the Dual Concepts Objection applied to 'arthritis' but not 'gold') assumes that if Alf expresses one truth-conditional content with 'Uncle Bob had arthritis' and the negation of that truth-conditional content with 'Uncle Bob didn't have arthritis', then he would know it immediately and without effort. Let's make the assumption explicit.

*Truth-Conditional Privileged Access:* if someone associates a truth-conditional content with his use of 'a has F' and the negation of that truth-conditional content with 'a doesn't have F', then he will be able to know, immediately and without effort, that one truth-conditional content is the negation of the other.

I want to make four observations regarding this principle.

First and most important, I for one don't see any reason to think that this will be true for 'arthritis' but false for 'gold'. Thus, even if Truth-Conditional Privileged Access is true, so Distinct Concepts can be true as well when applied to truth-conditional contents, this is of little help to the internalist's argument (which you'll recall needs to find a disanalogy in the 'arthritis' and 'gold' arguments).

Second, this principle is question-begging against the externalist. The externalist has plausibly argued that while Greg mistakenly believes that 'gold' is ambiguous, he still rationally believes that gold is yellow (he has believed that claim for many years) and that gold isn't yellow (he has believed that claim ever since he learned a little chemistry). Greg does not know, immediately or otherwise, that his one gold truth-conditional content is the negation of the other gold truth-conditional content.<sup>9</sup> That is, the externalist's argument applied to 'gold' *just is* an argument against Truth-Conditional Privileged Access!

Third, this externalist rejection of Distinct Concepts is plausible. Consider line (6) applied to 'gold' and, appropriately, truth-conditional contents (and recall that Greg is the person who thinks 'gold' is ambiguous):

The truth-conditional content of the single concept Greg associates with 'gold' in 'Pure gold isn't yellow' isn't the truth-conditional content of the single concept he associates with 'gold' in 'Pure gold is yellow' (both utterances occurring after studying chemistry and coming to mistakenly think that 'gold' is ambiguous).

This claim looks false, since it's not very plausible to think that Greg is employing two *truth-conditional* contents with his uses of 'gold'. Sure enough, after studying chemistry Greg associated two "mental files" with 'gold'. And, what might be different, at that time he associates two total conceptions with

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<sup>9</sup> Keep in mind that there is just one word 'gold' in the English language, and Alf is confused about *it*. It's not as though there are two coreferential English words that happen to be spelled the same.

‘gold’. Furthermore, we might have privileged access to such conceptions. For instance, if we employ a single total conception or mental file in two occurrent thoughts, then we will be able to know that fact immediately and without effort. Any full theory of concepts and conceptions will have to acknowledge and say something interesting about those important facts (or explain them away). But when Greg says, in a scientific spirit, ‘Gold is an element, not a compound’ and, in a non-scientific but assertive spirit echoing what he learned as a child, ‘Most wedding rings are made of gold’, he associates the very same truth-conditionally relevant value with his two uses of ‘gold’. The two uses of ‘gold’ do indeed express importantly different things, as just acknowledged, but they express the same truth-conditionally relevant value. In one sense of ‘concept’, he associates two concepts with ‘gold’, but these two concepts have the same truth-conditional content. Since (6) says otherwise, and the Dual Concepts argument is okay up through (4) when construed to target truth-conditional content, the blame must lie with (5), Distinct Concepts for truth-conditional content.

Thus, we have found another problem with the ‘gold’ argument: Distinct Concepts is false for truth-conditional content. The externalist can plausibly hold that Greg has two concepts of gold, each associated with some of his uses of ‘gold’, but the two concepts have the same truth-conditional content. Greg’s satisfaction of ‘Gold is yellow’ is still oblique because replacing ‘gold’ with a synonym like ‘schmold’ (pretend that’s a synonym for ‘gold’) need not appear to preserve truth-value (if we tell the story appropriately, fitting Greg into a classic Frege puzzle situation).

Fourth, the externalist can account for the intuitive support Truth-Conditional Privileged Access has without admitting its truth. She is free to admit that if someone expresses a complex of total conceptions with his use of ‘a has F’ and the negation of that complex with ‘a doesn’t have F’, then he will be able to know, immediately and without effort, that one complex is the negation of the other. When we feel as though we have perfect knowledge of identities and non-identities among our own conceptions, we are *right* (which should be comforting to the advocate of the Dual Concepts Objection), but the conceptions in question aren’t truth-conditional contents.

## 6. Does Stipulation Create a Relevant Difference?

Since the externalist is ultimately interested in truth-conditional contents, any anti-externalist is advised to direct her objections to such contents. We have one remaining question to answer: is there any relevant difference in the two arguments after line (6), so the internalist can mount a decent criticism of non-natural kinds externalism?

It might seem that the two arguments are different right at premise (7), Expertise. Expertise as applied to ‘gold’ presupposes that there is “the” concept of gold. The internalist might think that this presupposition is false for ‘gold’ even though it’s true for ‘arthritis’. She might say that we each have a conception of gold, but there is no one concept that one must express with ‘gold’ in order to satisfy ‘S said that gold is F’ with one’s assents to ‘Gold is F’. On the other hand, there is a single, privileged ‘arthritis’ concept—the one fixed by the definition ‘inflammation of the joints’.



However, this internalist defense is confused. When we say that that “the concept of F” is the concept that one needs to associate with  $\lceil F \rceil$  we are using ‘concept’ in the sense of ‘conceptual content’. If you like, we can say that everyone has their own concept of gold and there is no such thing as “the” concept of gold. That’s fine. But then we insist that in order to satisfy *de dicto* uses of  $\lceil$ believes that gold is X $\rceil$  one must have a concept of gold with a certain content or meaning C. That is what Expertise focuses on, C, even if everyone has different concepts.

One can, however, employ a different internalist objection that trades on stipulation. One might think that since ‘arthritis’ has a stipulative definition (for the sake of argument pretend that it does), since it’s a mere *shorthand* for ‘inflammation of the joints’, one can’t competently use the term unless one knows the definition. After all, one cannot competently use the mathematical ‘x<sup>y</sup>’ unless one knows that it means ‘x multiplied by itself y times’; the former is just a mere linguistically arbitrary shortening of the latter. The same should hold for ‘arthritis’ and ‘inflammation of the joints’, as the former is (in our fiction) just linguistically arbitrary shorthand for the latter.

This argument, which I dub the *Simple Concepts Objection*, does not concern ambiguity, confusion, privileged access, or a pair of concepts. Thus, it’s quite different from the Dual Concepts Objection even if it’s inspired by some of the thoughts that inspire the latter. But there are serious problems with using it against externalism.

First and most important, even if it’s perfectly sound it doesn’t help the internalist. Virtually no terms are introduced via stipulation. Most general non-natural kind terms aren’t stipulative: for instance, ‘business’, ‘baseball game’, ‘calendar’, ‘movie’, ‘laptop’, ‘cell phone’, ‘democracy’, or ‘arthritis’ for that matter. The Simple Concepts Objection is hardly impressive when aimed at such social yet non-stipulative terms; surely we must demand better arguments. So even if stipulation does make a difference to the externalist argument (making it flawed for stipulative terms), this doesn’t suggest that the externalist argument is flawed for general non-natural kind terms.

Second, the Dual Concepts Objection is still flawed for both ‘arthritis’ and ‘gold’; and that was the influential internalist argument I chose to examine.

Third, as I pointed out earlier even if the Dual Concepts Objection were sound for ‘arthritis’, ‘business’, ‘baseball game’, ‘calendar’, ‘movie’, ‘laptop’, ‘cell phone’, ‘democracy’, and other general non-natural kind terms (as well as stipulative terms), externalism is untouched because the objection suggests no flaw in the argument for externalism for natural kind terms.

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